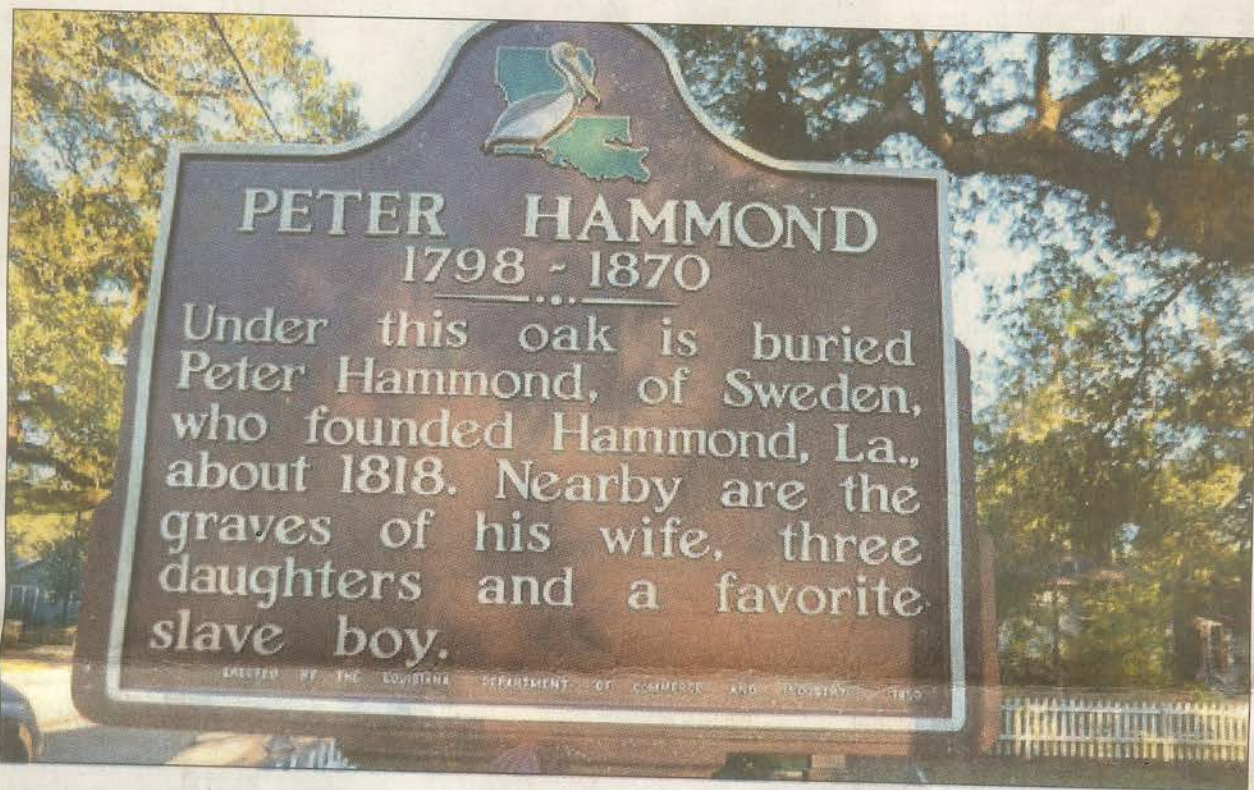


Search for a Name



CORRECTING A WRONG — Afternoon sunlight falls on the sign at the Peter Hammond graveyard. Hammond Historic District Commission is facilitating a research project to find the identity of the unnamed slave who was buried with the city's founder. Researchers believe his name could be Gaston based on an article from the Hammond Vindicator, a defunct newspaper archived at the Southeastern Louisiana University library.

Photos by Lauren Langlois

Researchers may have identified slave buried with city founder

BY LAUREN LANGLOIS

staffwriter@hammondstar.com

The identity of a slave buried with Peter Hammond has remained a mystery for generations, but researchers have found a name they believe could be his.

Hammond Historic District Commission is facilitating a research project into the identity of the slave, a project that is expected to be an ongoing endeavor. They have found the name Gaston in reference to the unnamed person who has never been properly remembered.

Researchers are working to confirm what they have found so far by gathering more evi-

dence. Commission Director Leah Solomon said it is important that the project rests on facts, so they can build an accurate and full picture of him.

Once more is known, the city will replace the current grave marker with one that respectfully remembers him, she said.

The graveyard where the unnamed slave is buried is about a block east of Hammond City Hall on East Charles Street in a quiet residential neighborhood. In front of the site is a sign that mentions him only in reference to the family that owned him.

The site is anchored by an



A MYSTERY — The sign in front marks the resting place of several members of the Peter Hammond family. It is also the site of the grave of an unnamed slave who researchers are working to identify. Hammond Historic District Commission is facilitating the project.

Please see **GRAVE** | 3A

REMEMBERING THE UNNAMED SLAVE

— Here lies a person, whose grave was only marked as “unnamed slave boy.” His remains are among several buried in the Hammond family plot about a block east of City Hall on East Charles Street.

Photo by Lauren Langlois



GRAVE

CONTINUED FROM 1A

impressive tree, the Hammond Oak, that is surrounded by graves of the Hammonds. A stone near the fence that surrounds the graveyard marks his grave with the words “Unnamed Slave Boy.”

The front sign states “Under this oak is buried Peter Hammond, of Sweden, who founded Hammond, La., about 1818. Nearby are the graves of his wife, three daughters, and a favorite slave boy.” The sign was erected by the Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry in 1950.

Solomon said the mayor’s office contacted her about a month ago to see if this unnamed person’s identity could be researched and discovered so the city could finally remember him properly as a figure in Hammond’s history.

An essential find was a 1969 article in the Hammond Vindicator written by Velmarae Dunn. The article describes the family plot and its origins. Dunn wrote the site became a graveyard when Peter Hammond buried

a “favorite negro slave child, Gaston, who died of yellow fever.”

She continued, “As a child, this writer remembers a plain wooden rectangle with a circular top placed near the gate entrance. Perhaps this mound of earth fanned by swaying palmettos was the grave of...” Unfortunately for the researchers, the next page of the article was not included in the Ginger Romero Collection housed in the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies at Southeastern’s Sims Library.

What they know is Hammond owned eight slaves as of 1850, according to a slave schedule from that year. Also, the City of Hammond took over the upkeep of the site from the Hammond family sometime in the 1980s.

Based on the 1969 article, researchers believe the slave’s name was Gaston and his cause of death was yellow fever. Dunn was a close friend of the Hammond descendants. They found a handwritten list of members of the Hammond family, including the name Gaston

listed above slave, in the Velmarae Dunn archival collection also at the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies.

They believe he died in the early 1860s before the rest of the Hammonds and was the first to be buried at the site. This assumption comes from another article about the graveyard written by Thomas S. Ellis and published in 1932 in the Hammond Vindicator.

The 1850 slave schedule says Peter Hammond had three male slaves. The schedule gives their ages as 5, 24 and 28. Based on this and the fact that he may have died in the early 1860s, Gaston could possibly have been 15, 34 or 38 when he died, researchers speculate.

Researchers say more work needs to happen to resurrect this person who has remained in the shadows for so long. It will be a long journey to answer the question of who was the unnamed slave.

They want to reach out to descendants of the Hammond family and scour through church records to see if they can find a possible baptism for him or some other documentation. Another source they hope to find is Hammond family correspondences and diaries that may talk in detail about him.

Researchers want to spread the word far and wide so that anyone with more information can come forward and help solve this historic puzzle. People who wish to help out with this project should contact the district at (985) 277-5684.

The district and stakeholders in the project are planning a memorial service on All Saints Day, Nov. 1, at noon. It will be open to anyone wanting to remember him properly. Participants will lay down flowers and wreaths at his grave and then have a discussion on the ongoing project.

TANGI

CONTINUED FROM 1A

members of the Sand Hill